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Starting an Office Paper Recycling Scheme

Clean white office waste paper is always wanted by paper merchants as it is easily recycled back into high grade paper. Mixed papers also have another life as the raw material for packaging. Approximately 70% of office waste is paper so doing your bit towards saving resources starts here.

The Government's revised Waste Strategy (May 2007) is looking at ways to reduce the amount of potentially recyclable material going to landfill or other disposal options. Waste disposal costs are rising – increased charges are unavoidable. Staying ahead by reducing paper use and recycling will make good business sense, as well as having environmental benefits.

A checklist of key issues can be downloaded here.

Getting started – a checklist

This checklist provides some pointers for starting a voluntary collection scheme within the office.

Planning

- 1 Setting up a collection scheme needn't be an onerous task. Spending a little time doing the necessary preparation, including information gathering about what local facilities exist for organisations wishing to recycle paper, is essential.
- 2 Look at what is currently thrown away. Is it mainly high-grade office paper or lower grade materials, including envelopes? Estimate amounts (e.g. x sacks per week) so you can tell potential collectors. A waste audit can help supply answers – see **Waste Audit**, <http://eaclink.info/?KKQOT>.
- 3 Contact the local council or local paper recycling collectors to see what's on offer. Does your local Council offer a free collection services for charities? Check the council's website or ring their local recycling hotline – the service isn't always publicised.
- 4 If not, commercial companies, not-for-profits or social enterprises will be your next point of call. Arrangements vary from company to company but many provide bins or sacks as well as publicity materials to help people get into the paper-saving habit at work.

- 5 Choose the company most suited to your requirements e.g. is most of your waste white office paper or mixed? How often do you want collections?
- 6 Check out all the details before you start collecting paper. This includes: minimum quantities for collection per visit, collection and loading points, safe storage and fire risks.
 - 7 You may have to pay a small collection charge but this can be offset by savings made in other areas e.g. a reduced stationery bill because your paper saving efforts mean less paper is being used. If any money is on offer for top-grade paper, is there a favourite local charity that can be supported? This might help motivate people less enthusiastic about the new recycling efforts.
- 8 Is there a nominated person in the office who will help answer queries and informally show people how easy it can be to get into the recycling habit?
- 9 Think creatively. An 'ideas box' for staff/volunteers/building users can help generate good ideas when setting up schemes (e.g. how to get people saving paper, possible locations for recycling bins, problem solving issues)

Start collecting

- 1 Make it easy for people to support the recycling campaign by providing clear information.
- 2 Use staff meetings, notice boards and internal emails to kick-start the process.
- 3 Make sure paper recycling bins are really handy – label them clearly so visitors know what they are for.
- 4 Visual reminders help. All material must be free from contaminants such as plastic and food otherwise it will be rejected by collectors.

Things that shouldn't go in paper collection bins:

- Sandwich wrappings
- Food leftovers
- Paper clips
- Plastic cups and wrappings
- Paper embossed with metal foil
- Laminated paper and card
- Mixed paper (if you are collecting white office waste)

Put a notice above the photocopier (if you have one) encouraging people to reuse rejects (if single-sided) or recycle (if double-sided copying).

Keep circulating ideas too about saving paper (see 'Key points for a Paper-Saving Campaign', <http://eaclink.info/?HVHOR>).

Review progress

- Agree a time to review how things are going fairly soon after starting. Who you involve depends on the size of your organisation and whether recycling is part of a formal Environmental Management System or other monitoring system. The aim will be to iron out any problem areas and perhaps look ahead to setting targets. Your paper collector will soon let you know if there are contamination issues and these need to be quickly tackled if your scheme is to work.
- Could you be recycling other types of paper? Maybe people want to try other materials?
- Do staff/volunteers need more help or incentives?
- Publicise your scheme in external newsletters, Annual Report and website. It's a visible part of demonstrating your commitment to reducing environmental impact.
- Maximise your gains by focusing on reducing paper use in the office - See 'Key points for a paper-saving campaign' (<http://eaclink.info/?HVHOR>).

One Bin Day Challenge – a way to highlight the need for action

How often are your office bins emptied? If they are full of paper by midday then something is wrong. Run an informal awareness session – a 'One Bin Day' challenge gives a stark visual illustration of just how much waste one office can generate. Restricting the availability of office bins to one location for one day can spur people into reuse and recycling.